

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 202734 POSS DUPE
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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 202734

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: SREF

SUBJECT: PROSPECTS FOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INDO-
CHINESE REFUGEES

REF: CANBERRA 6180 (NOTAL)

1. REFTEL REPORTED GOA VIEWS FOLLOWING RETURN OF IMMI-
GRATION MINISTER MACKELLAR FROM VISIT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA,
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PAGE 02 STATE 202734 POSS DUPE

RAISING QUESTION OF WHETHER TO PROMOTE CONFERENCE ON INDO-
CHINESE REFUGEES IN BANGKOK TO COINCIDE WITH VISIT THERE
OF HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES IN SEPTEMBER.

2. SUBJECT OF CONFERENCE DISCUSSED AUGUST 8 WHEN DAS
OAKLEY AND HA/ORM DIRECTOR LOWMAN BRIEFED AUSTRALIAN
EMBASSY COUNSELOR COTTRILL ON REFUGEE ITEM IN LAST WEEK'S

US-ASEAN TALKS. AT US-ASEAN TALKS, SECRETARY VANCE RAISED QUESTION OF WHETHER INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE -- PRESUMABLY UNDER UNHCR AUSPICES -- SHOULD NOT BE HELD TO BRING WIDER ATTENTION TO PROBLEM OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES. THERE WAS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO HAVE CONFERENCE ATTENDED BY COUNTRIES OF THE REGION, COUNTRIES PROVIDING RESETTLEMENT AND ASSISTANCE, AND COUNTRIES THAT SHOULD BE PREVAILED UPON TO DO MORE, TO EXCLUDE COUNTRIES LIKELY TO USE CONFERENCE FOR POLITICAL

PURPOSES, AND TO KEEP CONFERENCE FOCUSED ON INDOCHINA REFUGEES.

3. COTTRILL INDICATED THAT GOA FELT THAT UNHCR AND HCR HIMSELF NOT IN FAVOR OF LARGE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON OCCASION OF SEPTEMBER BANGKOK VISIT -- FIRST VISIT OF HCR TO SOUTHEAST ASIA -- BUT THAT THEY DO ENVISION SHORT SESSION WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF INTERESTED ASEAN POWERS AND PRESUMABLY A FEW COUNTRIES OF PERMANENT RESETTLEMENT. THIS IS IN ACCORD WITH GOA THINKING.

4. WE REPLIED THAT SUCH A SMALL SESSION WITH THE HCR WOULD BE USEFUL TO INCREASE MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM, AND HOW TO DEAL WITH IT WITHIN PRESENT FRAMEWORK. HOWEVER, SUCH A MEETING IN BANGKOK ALSO SHOULD EXPLORE IN DETAIL THE DESIRABILITY OF HOLDING A LARGER CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 STATE 202734 POSS DUPE

CONFERENCE TO INCREASE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE FOR THE REFUGEE PROGRAM.

5. A BROAD-BASED CONFERENCE, IN OUR VIEW, COULD SERVE TO INCREASE RESOURCES DEVOTED TO THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEE PROBLEM, ALTHOUGH WE RECOGNIZE THE NEGATIVE IMPACT SUCH A CONFERENCE WOULD HAVE IF IT FAILED TO PRODUCE CONSTRUCTIVE RESULTS. IN ANY CASE, SUCH A CONFERENCE WOULD BE USEFUL FOR US AND FOR OTHERS BY SERVING TO BRING INTO FOCUS THE NEW DIMENSIONS OF THE REFUGEE SITUATION, THE NEW REASONS BEHIND IT AND THE NEED FOR GREATER EFFORTS. IT IS IMPORTANT AT THIS POINT TO OBTAIN BROADER RECOGNITION OF THE QUALITATIVE CHANGE IN THE REFUGEE EXODUS. THE COMMON ASSUMPTION HAS BEEN THAT THOSE WHO ESCAPED HAD BEEN CLOSELY INVOLVED WITH THE USG OR THE PREVIOUS INDOCHINESE GOVERNMENTS. THE MAKE-UP OF THE REFUGEE FLOW AND THE MOTIVATION OF THOSE ESCAPING AT PRESENT, HOWEVER, MAKE IT APPARENT THAT THE OVERWHELMING PRESSURES TO ESCAPE ARE NOW THOSE GENERATED BY THE RADICAL EFFORTS OF THE NEW INDOCHINESE STATES TO TRANSFORM THEIR SOCIETIES INTO AUTHORITARIAN, SOCIALIST MODELS. THE PRESENT SITUATION, THEREFORE, NOW PRESENTS A GRAVE HUMANITARIAN

PROBLEM OF A MORE GENERAL NATURE TO WHICH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD BE ASKED TO RESPOND MORE GENEROUSLY.

6. THE PROSPECT OF SPECIAL ATTENTION BY THE HCR IN BANGKOK AS WELL AS THE POSSIBILITY OF A LARGER CONFERENCE LATER, UNDER UNHCR AUSPICES, MIGHT TEND TO REDUCE THE STRAIN ON THE COUNTRIES OF FIRST ASYLUM, PARTICULARLY MALAYSIA, ALARMED AT RAPID REFUGEE BUILDUPS. THE PHASING OF A MORE RESTRICTED MEETING IN BANGKOK, TO BE FOLLOWED BY A BROADER CONFERENCE, TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE PACE AT

WHICH THE UNHCR IS WILLING TO ACT AS WELL AS THE FACT THAT IT WOULD BE A PRACTICAL IMPOSSIBILITY TO GET A CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 STATE 202734 POSS DUPE

LARGE SPREAD OF COUNTRIES TO SEND FOREIGN OFFICE REPRESENTATIVES TO SUCH A CONFERENCE ON SHORT NOTICE. ON THE OTHER HAND, UNLESS WE MOVE PROMPTLY TO DISCUSS THE CONFERENCE IDEA WITH UNHCR, THERE WILL BE INSUFFICIENT TIME TO DEVELOP SUCH AN APPROACH IN THE TIME FRAME OF THE FALL UNHCR EXCOMM MEETING. WHILE THE EXCOMM MEETING ITSELF MIGHT NOT BE THE MOST DESIRABLE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUCH A MEETING, THE PRESENCE IN GENEVA OF SENIOR REFUGEE OFFICIALS MAKE THAT THE MOST CONVENIENT TIME FOR SUCH A MEETINGS IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

7. COTTRILL UNDERTOOK TO CHECK BACK WITH CANBERRA ON ITS THINKING. IF GOA THINKING PARALLELS OURS, WE ENVISION APPROACHES TO THE ASEAN GOVERNMENTS BY OURSELVES AND THE GOA WITH A VIEW TO COORDINATING APPROACHES TO THE UNHCR FOR A RESTRICTED MEETING IN THAILAND OR MALAYSIA IN SEPTEMBER, AT WHICH TWO ISSUES WOULD BE DISCUSSED:

A. ASSESSMENT OF PRESENT SITUATION AND HOW TO IMPROVE COORDINATION AND OTHER PROCEDURES; AND

B. DESIRABILITY AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF A LARGER INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY HCR, PERHAPS IN CONNECTION WITH EXCOMM MEETING, OR AT A LATER DATE.

8. POST COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS ARE REQUESTED. VANCE

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